

Writer explores theological debate in new mystery novel

Laurie King will sign books Wednesday

By SCOTT DAVID BRENNAN
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — What if Mary Magdalene was an apostle of Jesus? Would it rock the core of conservative Christian theology? Watsonville mystery writer Laurie King's newest novel, "A Letter of Mary," takes a look at that possibility.

In the second chapter, detective Mary Russell is handed an ancient papyrus dug up by an archaeologist in Palestine. The tattered document suggests that Magdalene might have been an apostle of the "Anointed One." But the investigation turns to murder when the archaeologist is mysteriously run down by a car.

"Mary," King's sixth novel, is the third in a series of Holmesian-style novels that pick up where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle left off. The mystery's hero, Mary Russell, is not only the female counterpart to the character of Sherlock Holmes, she's also married to him in King's novel.

"It's a partnership as much as a marriage," King says. And Russell even outdoes Holmes at his own game of deduction on occasion, she said.

The book examines the social order and role of women in 1920s England, the self-styled feminist author said. The post World War



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Watsonville author Laurie King will host a reading and signing of her latest mystery novel, "A Letter of Mary," Wednesday night at Crossroads Books.

I era created radical changes in the status of European women, which are brought to life in her novel.

The book is written in strict Queen's English and painted in the atmosphere of 1920s England when the story takes place. To research her novel's background, King spent several days going through microfilmed rolls of the London Times, gleaning details of the era.

Shunning the computer, King writes her manuscripts with a fountain pen — which allows a speed just her pace, she said. She said she has been surprised at the wide variety of fan letters she receives, from 10-year-old girls to retired U.S. Air

Force colonels.

King, who received a bachelor's degree in religious studies at UC-Santa Cruz, has lived with her husband and two children in Watsonville for 15 years.

Her first published novel, "A Grave Talent," won her an Edgar award for the best first novel of 1993 from the Mystery Writers of America. And now "With Child," her last book, is up for best novel of the year.

King will meet with local residents for a reading and book signing of "A Letter of Mary" Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Crossroads Books, 1935 Main Street.